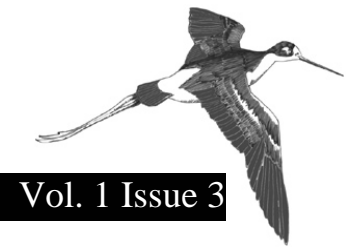


The Spring Wings Stilt

Winter 2006



President's Message

Happy New Years to all of you. This past Christmas my wife Marsha and I spent the holidays in Peru as a part of an "In The Field" tour. Joining us were two other board members and eight field trip leaders. (We'll share our memories during the Armchair Adventure Series to be held at the Churchill County Museum later this year.) While there, we invited all the birds in South America to join us at our ninth Spring Wings Bird Festival.

In November Marsha and I went back to the Washington DC area to represent our friends group at the National Wildlife Refuge Association's (NWRA) "Beyond the Boundaries Workshop". Thirty other friends groups from around the country also attended this conference, held at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. The facility alone was worth the trip! It is a world-class facility sitting on 540 acres less than an hour's drive from Washington. A huge Bald eagle's

nest can be seen from the main gate and the administration building, complete with a breeding pair of our national bird. The guest lodges, with names like, *Rachel Carson Lodge*, *Aldo Leopold Lodge* and *J. N. "Ding" Darling Lodge* are connected to each other, the dining facility and the instructional buildings by a series of paths that meander through an oak and pine forested area complete with Pileated Woodpeckers, Yellow-shafted Flickers, Eastern Warblers, White tailed deer, and beautiful fall colors.

Evan Hirsche, who was the Keynote Speaker at Spring Wings back in 1999 when he worked for National Audubon, is now the President of NWRA. He gave several talks throughout the workshop. Lynn Scarlett, Assistant Secretary, US Department of the Interior, gave the first night's Keynote on "Partnerships and Cooperative Conservation". Her talk reinforced how important friends groups are to the refuge system, especially for those refuges that are in areas that are becoming more urbanized.

The next couple of days were spent in breakout sessions covering assessment and analysis, process and planning, education and community outreach and communications, media relations.

Spring Wings Board of Directors

Jim Lytle – President
Carol Colip – Treasurer
Kathi Wilson – Secretary/Editor
DeAl Dankers, Kevin DesRoberts
Cindy Goddard, Rick Gray



I left these sessions with a couple of points. One, we are not alone. Most, if not all, of the friends groups are struggling with lack of community involvement and support, recruitment of enough active people to really be effective, and the lack of media attention. Second, the NWRA is there to help friends groups as well as the refuges themselves. The NWRA is a positive voice in Washington, lobbying on behalf of the refuge system, and they are able and willing to go the extra mile for us, the friends groups, as well. This workshop was a good example of that.

Last but not least, the construction of the observation deck out at Stillwater Point is almost complete. The dedication of the deck will be held Friday morning, May 12, the first day of Spring Wings, 2006.

Rescuing Owls

Dan Rabbers, Refuge Volunteer

As the growth rate for Northern Nevada continues to rise, the habitat for the wildlife continues to decline. So the critters need to find new homes. Sometimes things work out, but for many of the Barn owls of the Lahontan Valley, they have made a few bad choices in their nesting sites.

Barn owls all over the country, and even the world, have the same problem. They are normally found nesting in structures, whether they are barns, old houses, or any other abandoned or empty buildings. But around Fallon we don't have that many structures with these specs.

So the owls turn to the next best thing they can find: the haystacks. The spring and summer months around our Oasis of Nevada, are spent growing, cutting, and bailing the hay, which is stacked up to feed livestock through the winter and early spring months before the new plant life returns. Unfortunately, the Barn owls are one of the earliest nesters, so when they are searching for a suitable site, they find the hay stacks nearly untouched with the essential dry, dark places for nests. Then, as the ranchers take the hay down to feed livestock or to ship to other places, baby barn owls are found screeching and hungry, wondering why it is so bright all of a sudden.

Some of these babies have been rescued and sent down to the Wild Animal Infirmary For Nevada from eggs to nearly flight

capable juveniles. Others have been thrown aside by those who did not know what to do with them. Slowly the word is getting out that these owls can be rescued, but work is also needed to stop this from happening.

That is what the members of the Churchill County 4-H Wildlife Club and Webelos Pack 38, as well as some local residents, have been working on for the past year. Barn owl boxes have been built and placed in different locations throughout the valley to provide alternate, and safer, nesting sites. These boxes have been built with donations from Stillwater Wildlife Refuge, Lowe's of Carson City, and the Dodge Ranch, through materials, labor, or other means.

The boxes have been placed in locations with known owl activity or those where we hoped to attract owls to the suitable nesting site. The Barn owl is known as one of the best rodent eaters, so it is definitely a neighbor most people would like to have around. One box, built by a resident and placed on their property, already had a successful nest last year with two baby owls leaving the nest. The other boxes were put up a bit too late, but already this year there are two boxes that were placed last winter that have owls using them right now.

Two more boxes were placed in June for a different reason. Six owls were being returned from Nancy Laird at WAIF and they needed a place to go. They were all banded and placed, three into each box that awaited new

residents. One of these boxes is one that already has owls in it again this year, getting ready for the upcoming nesting season.

To better study and understand the movements, all the owls that are caught will be banded so we can find out where they started, where they moved to, and also the nesting success in the boxes. Boxes will be checked on a regular basis to make sure as many adults are banded as possible and also to know when the nesting has started so the babies can be banded as well.

Twenty-four more boxes were built in December, with nine of the boxes being placed on the 7th of January, 6 more on February 11th. A few will be kept in case more nests are found so we can transfer the owl family directly into the box. The adult owls are much better at raising their young than humans.

The group also had the first success of the project with one of the boxes that was installed last year already having a pair of adults preparing for nesting. Both were banded and the box will be monitored so the juvenile owls may be banded as well.



Ashley Gibbons and Nicholas Cox are working hard on their boxes



Wayne Whitten, Kevin Ohlandt, Jolynn Lehman and Gaven Betts dig the next hole.



Dan Rabbers, 4-h Wildlife Club leader, gets help from Jolynn Lehman and Gaven Betts to attach the box to the pole.



The finished project....a shining example of what our young volunteers can do.

If you would like to help with this project in any way, contact Dan Rabbers at 423-4980. Also call Dan if you are interested in joining the Wildlife 4-H Club.

Christmas Bird Count for Churchill County Circle - 2005

Local birders recently participated in the 106th Annual Christmas Bird Count, spotting 93 bird species in the Churchill County Circle – a designated area 15 miles in diameter.

The fourteen volunteers from were separated into six county groups. Each completed a census of the birds found in their area. An approximate total of 57,810 birds were seen, according to Jeanne Tinsman

First time counter Kathi Wilson, of Fallon, said, “It was a great birding day. I rode with two experienced birders who could identify the birds by sight, sound and flight patterns. They knew of special places to look for the birds that are year-round residents of the Lahontan Valley. I saw my first Sora rail and our group saw Great tailed Grackles. Neither of these birds had been spotted during the past five Christmas Counts.

Participating from Fallon were Larry Neel, Kevin DesRoberts, Jeanne Tinsman, Lynn Clark, Bill Henry, Dan Rabbers, Gary Cottle, Bill and Corrina Mewaldt, and Kathi Wilson. Out-of-townners helping were Jerry Daniel of Dayton, Dennis Serdehely of Fernley, Dave McNinch of Reno and Janet Bair from the Reno FWS (Fish and Wildlife Service).

Jeanne Tinsman, local compiler, stated, “The annual Christmas Count involves volunteers from

all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, the West Indies and Pacific Islands. The results of these Counts affect bird conservation. The data is analyzed and the results are used to prioritize Audubon’s bird conservation activities.”

Count results from 1900 to the present are available at www.audubon.org/bird/cbc.

SPRING WINGS FEATURED SPEAKERS

Janet Schmidt, the Outdoor Recreation Planner for the Stillwater National Water Refuge, recently announced the speakers for the 9th Annual Spring Wings Bird Festival, to be held May 12, 13 and 14, 2006. Keynote speaker for the Friday banquet will be Jonathan Stacey, manager of the Rio-Tinto-Birdlife International Program, from London. He will speak on his job and how he assists communities like ours in conservation efforts.

The Stillwater Refuge and the Audubon Society’s Important Bird Area (IBA) program were the recipients of a sizeable grant from Birdlife International for furthering the IBA program and Stillwater Point Project. A dedication of the Point Overlook is scheduled for May 12th.

Don McIvor, who works with Nevada Audubon’s IBA program, will be the speaker for Saturday night. We’ll have his recently released *Important Bird Areas* for sale.

Letter to The Stilt

From Bonny Douglas (in response to request for birders to share their birding adventures of 2005)

My husband and I started out last year late in December (12-17-04) to visit Big Bend National Park and Aransas Pass, Texas to go birding. We got to Big Bend on Christmas day and I managed to see several new birds: male and female Pyrrhuloxia, Spotted Towhee, Clay-colored Robin, Ovenbird, Vermillion Flycatcher, and Ring-necked Turtle Doves.

We got to Rockport December 30th and made that our home base for the next four days. For \$30 you could take a boat ride to see the Whooping cranes who come to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge every winter. It was really great; I not only saw the Whoopers but a Peregrine Falcon, a Kisskadee, a flock of Roseate Spoonbill, a rookery of Night Herons, and an eagle.

On our way home we were driving through New Mexico with our vintage airstream when I saw a billboard that said **BIRDWATCHING RV PARK!** My husband said, "I guess you want to stay here?" I answered, "You betcha!"...and we did.

It turns out this RV Park was at the entrance to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge where I saw hundreds of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese. Also saw four Bald Eagles and a Cooper's Hawk.

It was quite exciting and a wonderful bird trip.

(Note: Bonny has participated in our Festival since it began nine years ago. Unfortunately for us, she has just moved to Carthage, Missouri to be closer to her family. She promises to continue her birding wherever she and her husband take that vintage RV.)

PHOTO BLIND PHOTOS



Spring Wing Friends pose at the backside of the photo blind, which they completed in November. Volunteers working that day were Carol Colip, Nicki Reynolds, Kathi Wilson, Mike and Carol Goddard. Taking the picture was Dan Rabbers.



Cindy Goddard and Carol Colip just had to "try out" the blind.

If you are interested in joining us as a Friend's volunteer, contact Cindy Goddard at 423-5943. If you'd like to help at the Spring Wings Bird Festival call Carol Colip at 423-2083.

ANNOUNCING OUR FIRST ARMCHAIR ADVENTURES SERIES

Many of our "Friends" have ventured to various parts of the world in their desire to observe birds, enjoy nature and learn the history and culture of other countries. We have designed a series of multi-media presentations at the Churchill County Museum so that they can share their adventures with you.

Monday, March 20: We'll begin our escapades on the continent of Europe as Larry and Marsha Neel enlighten you with remembrances of their trip to Scotland last year.

Monday, April 17: Next, we'll navigate to North America via a power point program giving the history of Fallon's Spring Wings Bird Festival...now in its 9th year.

Monday, May 22: Donna Wither's North American adventure takes place weekly at Anahoe Island. Her power point presentation will teach why the Lahontan Valley is so important to the American white pelican.

Monday, June 19: Peruse Peru with Jim and Marsha Lytle, Mike and Cindy Goddard, Al and Teresa Gubanich, and Carol Colip.

Monday, July 17: Central America will be represented as Jim and Marsha Lytle share the pleasures of Panama.

Meetings begin at 7:00 pm.